

Helpful Hints for Participating in the National Science Bowl®

The following helpful hints are provided as an aid in developing team strategies and should not be considered as part of the rules themselves. As with any competition, the judgment and application of any rule is the responsibility of the match officials.

Rules - The rules for the National Science Bowl® (NSB) competition are posted on the NSB web site (<http://science.energy.gov/nsb/>). Most regional competitions also use these rules, but some regionals may have a modified format and rules. Be sure to carefully read the rules for your regional (and hopefully when you compete at the national event). Rules may added or modified from year to year and you should not assume they would be the same as last year.

Changing Team Members - Only original students, who participated (as a primary or an alternate) in the regional competition, will be eligible to participate at the national event. Changing participants between the regional and national events is not allowed.

Toss-up Questions - If a member of your team answers a toss-up question incorrectly, other members of the team cannot try to answer the same question. Speed is very important on toss-up questions. A team member should not hold back to see if a "smarter" teammate will try to answer - go for it.

Multiple Choice Questions - On multiple-choice questions, contestants may provide the letter signifying the answer (i.e.: w, x, y, or z); the answer itself; or both the letter and the answer. Because the answer must specifically be what the moderator read, many teams choose to answer with only the letter to avoid confusion. Contestants trying to answer with both the letter and the specific answer run the risk of confusing the wrong letter with answer, and both must be correct. Most teams choose to answer with the letter only to avoid this confusion.

Verbal Recognition - Not waiting for verbal recognition is the most common mistake made in the opening rounds of nearly every science bowl competition.

Consulting with Teammates (toss-up questions only) - "No consultation" includes both verbal and non-verbal communication. If consultation occurs, the team will be disqualified from answering that question.

Captains Provide the Team's Answer (bonus questions only) - Comments and answers provided by other team members are treated as consultations with the team captain. The captain must decide which answer is to be provided on behalf of the team.

25 Questions per Round - Matches consist of 25 toss-up and 25 associated bonus questions. Most regional rounds with eight-minute halves only get through 18-22 questions. Many National matches with ten-minute halves end when the entire set of 25 questions has been read. Keeping track of the number of questions read may help teams strategically, either in coming from behind or protecting a lead.

Calculations - Questions that require some calculations or sorting out must still be answered promptly after verbal recognition. Extra time for calculations is not allowed. Be sure you can answer the question promptly after you buzz in and are recognized.

Bonus Questions - The 20 seconds count is a maximum. Most teams do not use the total 20 seconds and judges watch closely to prevent stalling.

Errors by the Moderator - If the moderator makes a mistake, usually giving an answer at the wrong time, the team (or teams) will be offered the next question. Since successive questions are always in different science categories, the next question will not be in the same field as the one thrown out. This is the only time when a toss-up and bonus question may not be in the same scientific field.

Clock Stoppages/Challenges - Challenges must be immediate and without the aid of coaches or alternates. There may be no talking (among team members or the audience) while the judges are deciding the outcome of a challenge.

Questions as Time Expires - These rules are very detailed and can be hard to understand in the heat of a competition. Be sure to review these rules and strategies in detail to avoid confusion. The interrupt of a toss-up question as time is running out has an added penalty of suspending the clock and guaranteeing the other team a chance to answer. Special care is taken in the rules to reduce stalling near the end of a competition.

Tie-Breakers - Be sure to understand these rules carefully as some modification may be written for your local region. Different playing strategies should be utilized for each type of tie-breaker format. Play will be as continuous as possible, but there is usually a short break before the tiebreaker questions begin. Teams should use this break to adjust their playing strategies as necessary and to remind all participants of the rules.

Substitutions - Substitutions may be made at the half of any match; there are no rules that restrict the selection of participants at the beginning of any match. No substitutions are allowed between the end of the second half and tiebreakers.

Coaches and Alternates must sit together - This rule is primarily to allow the coaches to monitor each other's communications with their teams.

Notes - No notes can be written during the introductions or before the first question is begun. A common mistake is for participants to start writing critical equations during the reading of the rules by the moderator – this is not allowed.